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RR RUEHBC RUEHKUK
DE RUEHDE #4047/01 1791638
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 281638Z JUN 06
FM AMCONSUL DUBAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1848
INFO RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI 1595
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RHMFIUU/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 4821

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBAI 004047

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SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR NEA/IR; ISN/RA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IR](#) [ZP](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KNNP](#)

SUBJECT: IRANIAN OFFICIAL STATEMENTS ON THE NUCLEAR ISSUE

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1.(SBU) Summary: Iranian officials and government-run media reports present a range of outlooks on the nuclear issue, from pessimistic to hopeful. The negative comments assert that the ultimate goal of the US is the overthrow of the Iranian government, regardless of outcome of the nuclear issue. While most statements reflect a degree of satisfaction with the US diplomatic overture, there is criticism of the proposal's requirement for enrichment suspension and of the West's demand for a response. All interlocutors continue to deny Iran is seeking a nuclear weapon. They remain ambiguous on Iran's willingness to use oil as a weapon, not ruling it out as an option. The absence of a formal response to the P5-1 package may be an indication that the Iranian government has not yet reached consensus on an approach, or it may reflect a strategy to try to gain leverage in negotiations, or a combination of both. End Summary.

On Negotiations with the US

2.(U) Supreme Leader Khamenei said on June 27 that negotiating with America does not benefit Iran, Iranians do not need negotiations, and that Iran will not negotiate on its right to use nuclear technology. "However, if they (presumably the US) recognize this right for us, we are prepared to talk about international controls, supervision and guarantees, and the grounds for such negotiations have been prepared."

3.(U) Foreign Minister Mottaki spoke positively about both the P5-1 proposal and Iran's position in recent interviews. In reporting of meetings with Turkish Foreign Minister Gul, Mottaki was quoted saying the proposal had positive points but also ambiguities. He indicated Iran would study the nuclear package carefully and seriously and that Iran would not accept deadlines for a reply or preconditions for a meeting. He said P5-1 decision-making meetings without Iran would jeopardize the positive process and stressed negotiations with Europe more than with the US. He emphasized Iran's support from the Non-Aligned Movement and (unidentified) Islamic countries.

4.(U) Expediency Council Chairman Rafsanjani also emphasized positive developments in the negotiations, remarking on the relative calm that has followed the "European" proposal package. On June 23, he stated -- in interviews and in Friday prayers -- that the grounds for negotiations are set, and the parties should try to build trust and solve the problems through

negotiation. Rafsanjani maintained this positive outlook in later interviews when he said dialogue and peace were keys to the nuclear problem. He reiterated Iran wanted nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

5.(U) Government Spokesman Gholam-Hossein Elham said June 26 that the current global atmosphere was conducive to reaching a diplomatic settlement.

6.(U) In a series of interviews, Ali Larijani, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, indicated that the P5-1 nuclear package is a positive overture. Iran would respond as soon as possible and experts were working hard on counter-proposals. He also said Iran wants to solve the issue in a rational way. Allies of both sides (Iran and the P5-1 countries) can serve as good mediators for solving the issue, and both sides could come up with a mutually beneficial agreement.

On US intentions

7.(U) Larijani on June 23 accused the US of seeking regime change, regardless of the outcome of the nuclear crisis. He called the USG's request for USD75 million to promote democracy in Iran a strategy to overthrow the government.

8.(U) President Ahmadinejad praised the recent calm in the political environment, while emphasizing that Iran is used to sacrifice and can live under hard conditions if necessary. In several public gatherings, he emphasized the need for Iranians to join together in national unity and persevere through whatever hardship foreign powers may inflict on them.

9.(U) A commentary June 25 in conservative newspaper Resalat argued that the US was trying to lead the negotiations into a deadlock in order to precipitate a crisis.

On Enrichment Suspension

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10.(U) In a survey of political figures and analysts this week by Mehr News Agency, most respondents believed Iran should either not accept suspension preconditions or only accept suspensions during the talks. There was general consensus that Iran should negotiate with the West, and that recent political developments were somewhat positive, although ambiguous. Foreign Ministry Spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi on June 26 denied reports that Iran would suspend enrichment for three months, saying such a move would be a "step backwards."

11.(U) The Resalat commentary referenced above asserted that the nuclear proposal must recognize Iran's right to enrich uranium on its own soil.

On Nuclear Weapons

12.(U) Almost all official statements include the standard refrain that Iran is not pursuing nuclear weapons, only nuclear energy. The reasons given why Iran is not pursuing a weapons program range from the desire to have a nuclear-free Middle East -- usually a pointed jab at Israel -- to the assertion that nuclear weapons are un-Islamic. The justification for the nuclear program is the need to fulfill rising energy demands. In a June 27 interview, the Minister of Science, Research, and Technology, Mohammad Mehdi Zahedi, accused Western powers of imposing a "scientific apartheid" on Iran to prevent it from developing new technologies. Mottaki, Larijani, and other officials echoed his comments.

Oil as a Weapon?

13.(U) Larijani on June 23 denied reports that Iran would block

oil routes in the Strait of Hormuz if sanctions or force were imposed. Elham said June 26 that the government would not use oil as a weapon, unless the country's interests came under attack.

14.(SBU) Comment: The somewhat discordant messages among the top officials of the government may be a strong signal that there is a lack of agreement on which path to pursue in the negotiations. Ahmadinejad's declaration that Iran would respond by August 22 may indicate officials are not yet close to a compromise. At the same time, there may be a deliberate strategy not to commit in order to try to get the upper-hand in negotiations and to prove it will not submit to pressure.

15.(SBU) Comment continued: Although Iranian officials did not specify which "allies" they believe can help the negotiation process, the extensive coverage in the Iranian press on Gul's recent meetings in Tehran may indicate that Iran views Turkey as a good candidate for mediation.

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